

Message Text

PAGE 01 STATE 219300

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TAGS: PFOR, KS

SUBJECT:ROPER REPORT ON PUBLIC OPINION RE SOUTH KOREA

REF: TOSEC 080141, 7/29/75

1. THERE IS NEW EVIDENCE THAT THE AMERICAN PUBLIC IS ABOUT
EVENLY DIVIDED ON WHETHER THE US SHOULD REDUCE OR STAND BY
ITS COMMITMENTS TO SOUTH KOREA. WE REPORTED LOU HARRIS'
CONCLUSIONS IN REFTTEL.

2. IN LATE JULY THE ROPER ORGANIZATION EXPLORED THE SAME
SUBJECT WITH A NATIONAL CROSS-SECTION OF THE PUBLIC; THE
RESULTS ARE JUST NOW AVAILABLE. THE QUESTION WAS:

"THE UNITED STATES HAS 40,000 TROOPS IN SOUTH KOREA AND HAS
A TREATY TO USE US TROOPS IN DEFENSE OF SOUTH KOREA IF
NEEDED. THERE IS INCREASING TALK OF NORTH KOREA INVADING
SOUTH KOREA. DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD STAND BY OUR COMMITMENT

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PAGE 02 STATE 219300

TO SOUTH KOREA IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN OUR CREDIBILITY AND
ALLIANCES, OR THAT WE SHOULD REDUCE OUR COMMITMENTS TO SOUTH
KOREA IN ORDER TO AVOID US INVOLVEMENT IN ANOTHER WAR?"

3. THE RESPONSES WERE:

STAND BY COMMITMENTS 43
REDUCE COMMITMENTS 45
DON'T KNOW 12

4. THE VIEWS OF THOSE ADVOCATING A REDUCTION OF OUR COMMITMENTS WERE THEN EXPLORED IN TWO FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS. THE FIRST:

"AS FAR AS US TROOPS ARE CONCERNED, WE COULD PULL THEM OUT NOW, BUT THAT MIGHT ENCOURAGE NORTH KOREA TO INVADE. OR WE COULD LEAVE OUR TROOPS THERE AS A DETERRENT TO NORTH KOREA, PULLING THEM BACK AS BEHIND-THE-LINES ADVISORS IF NORTH KOREA SHOULD INVADE ANYWAY. DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD PULL OUR TROOPS OUT NOW, OR LEAVE THEM THERE AS DETERRENTS AND ADVISORS?"

5. OF THE 45 PERCENT WHO RESPONDED TO THE FIRST QUESTION IN FAVOR OF A REDUCTION IN COMMITMENT, ABOUT HALF (23 PERCENT) FAVORED WITHDRAWAL OF TROOPS EVEN AT THE RISK OF ENCOURAGING THE DPRK; 22 PERCENT FELT TROOPS SHOULD BE LEFT AS A DETERRENT. THIS DIVISION OF OPINION WAS REFLECTED IN ALL SEGMENTS OF THE POPULATION (BETTER AND LESS EDUCATED, ALL INCOME GROUPS, ETC.).

6. THE SECOND FOLLOW-UP QUESTION PUT TO THE 45 PERCENT FAVORING A REDUCTION IN THE US COMMITMENT FOCUSED ON ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE. IT ASKED:

"IN THE EVENT NORTH KOREA INVADES, WHAT SHOULD WE DO ABOUT AID TO SOUTH KOREA? DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD STOP ALL SUPPORT -- BOTH ECONOMIC AID AND ARMS -- OR THAT WE SHOULD SUPPLY ECONOMIC AID BUT NO ARMS, OR THAT WE SHOULD SUPPLY ALL THE ARMS AND AID THAT SOUTH KOREA NEEDS TO DEFEND ITSELF?"

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PAGE 03 STATE 219300

7. THE RESULTS WERE:

STOP ALL SUPPORT 15
SUPPLY ECONOMIC AID
BUT NO ARMS 20
SUPPLY ALL ARMS AND
AID NEEDED 9
DON'T KNOW 1

8. IN SUMMARY: IT IS A LITTLE DIFFICULT TO SAY WHETHER THE BASE OF SUPPORT (43 PERCENT) FOR STANDING BY OUR COMMITMENT TO THE ROK IS ENCOURAGING OR NOT; ONE COULD ARGUE--

BUT VERY HESITANTLY--THAT GIVEN THE HYPOTHETICAL NATURE OF THE QUESTION, AND RECENT MEMORIES OF INDOCHINA, IT IS SURPRISING THAT 43 PERCENT WOULD RESPOND IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. ON THE OTHER HAND, OUR ANALYST BELIEVES THAT SHOULD THE ISSUE BECOME A REAL ONE, THE UNDECIDEDS WOULD TEND TO LINE UP IN OPPOSITION AND SOME OF THOSE NOW IN FAVOR WOULD FALL AWAY, LEAVING A BASE OF PERHAPS 30-35 PERCENT OF THOSE FAVORING OUR PRESENT COMMITMENT. IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT THOSE WHO ARE MOST LIKELY TO HAVE TO FIGHT IF HOSTILITIES ARE RENEWED (BLACKS AND THOSE EARNING LESS THAN \$12,000) TEND TO REACT MORE NEGATIVELY THAN OTHERS, AS DO THOSE WHO DESCRIBE THEMSELVES AS MODERATES AND LIBERALS.

9. IN ANY EVENT, ONE IN FOUR AMERICANS WOULD HAVE THE US WITHDRAW ALL OF ITS FORCES EVEN AT THE RISK OF AN INVASION BY THE NORTH, AND ONE IN SIX WOULD OPPOSE ANY FORM OF AID IN EVENT THE SOUTH WAS INVADED.

10. FINALLY, THE FACT THAT ONLY ONE IN TEN WOULD SUPPLY ALL OF THE ARMS AND OTHER ASSISTANCE REQUIRED IN THE EVENT OF AN INVASION IS CONSISTENT WITH WHAT WE SUSPECT IS A GROWING DISENCHANTMENT WITH THE CONCEPT OF MILITARY ASSISTANCE. THIS TREND WAS NOTED BY SEVERAL OF THE POLLSTERS WHO TESTIFIED ON WEDNESDAY BEFORE THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE.

11. THESE FINDINGS ARE CONSISTENT WITH WHAT LOU HARRIS REPORTED IN JULY. HE FOUND 46 PERCENT OF THE PUBLIC OPPOSED TO THE US COMING TO THE DEFENSE OF SOUTH KOREA IN THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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PAGE 04 STATE 219300

EVENT IT WAS ATTACKED BY THE NORTH AND ONLY 39 PERCENT IN FAVOR. THE REMAINING 15 PERCENT HAD NO OPINION.

12. IN BOTH THE ROPER AND HARRIS SURVEYS, THE SITUATION WAS SPELLED OUT FOR RESPONDENTS IN UNUSUAL DETAIL, IF NOT ENTIRELY ACCURATELY. THEREFORE, THESE FINDINGS REPRESENT MORE THAN A SURFACE MEASUREMENT OF PUBLIC SENTIMENT. KISSINGER

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